

# GREEN FANCY

BY GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

Author of "GRAUSTARK," "THE HOLLOW OF HER HAND," "THE PRINCE OF GRAUSTARK," "FROM THE HOUSETOPS," ETC.

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## "DO NOT DESERT ME!"

**Synopsis.**—Thomas K. Barnes, a wealthy young New Yorker, on a walking trip in New England near the Canadian border, is given a lift in an automobile by a mysterious and attractive girl bound for a house called Green Fancy. At Hart's tavern Barnes finds a stranded troupe of "barn-storming" actors, of which Lyndon Rushcroft is the star and "Miss Thackeray" the leading lady. They are doing hotel work for their board. He learns Green Fancy is a house of mystery. That night two mounted men leave the tavern under odd circumstances. One is brought back dying. Barnes comes under suspicion. He stays to help clear up the mystery. O'Dowd of Green Fancy says that that place of mystery is not concerned in any way. Barnes gets into the Green Fancy grounds and sees the mysterious girl. She gives him the cut direct and O'Dowd politely ejects him from the grounds. Enter another man of mystery, Mr. Sprouse, "book agent."

## CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

"From what I hear the man Paul was shot through the lungs, directly from in front. The bullet went straight through his body. He was riding very rapidly down the road. When he came to a point not far above the crossroads he was fired upon. It is safe to assume that he was looking intently ahead, trying to make out the crossing. He was not shot from the side of the road, gentlemen, but from the middle of it. The bullet came from a point almost directly in front of him, and not from Mr. Curtis' property here to the left or Mr. Conley's on the right. The chances are that Paul did not accompany Roon to the meeting place up the road. He remained near the horses. That's how he managed to get away so quickly. It remained for the man at the crossroads to settle with him. But we're wasting time with all this twaddle of mine. Let us be moving. There is one point on which we must all agree. The deadliest marksmen in the world fired those shots. No bungling on that score, be damned."

In the course of time the party, traversing the ground contiguous to the public road, came within sight of the green dwelling among the trees. Barnes' interest revived. His second view of the house increased his wonder and admiration. If O'Dowd had not actually located it among the trees for him he would have been at a loss to discover it, although it was immediately in front of him and in direct line of vision.

De Soto was seen approaching through the green sea, his head appearing and disappearing intermittently in the billows formed by the undulating underbrush. He shook hands with Barnes a moment later.

"I'm glad you had the sense to bring Mr. Barnes with you, O'Dowd," said he. "You didn't mention him when you telephoned that you were personally conducting a sightseeing party. I tried to catch you afterward on the telephone, but you had left the Tavern. Mrs. Collier wanted me to ask you to capture Mr. Barnes for dinner tonight."

"Mrs. Collier is the sister of Mr. Curtis," explained O'Dowd. Then he turned upon De Soto incredulously. "For the love of Pat," he cried, "what's come over them? Why, I made so bold as to suggest last night that you were a chap worth cultivating, Barnes—and that you wouldn't be long in the neighborhood—but to save your feelings I'll not repeat what they said, the two of them. What changed them over, De Soto?"

"A chance remark of Miss Cameron's at lunch today. She wondered if Barnes could be the chap who wrote the articles about Peru and the Incas, or something of the sort, and that set them to looking up the back numbers of the Geographic Magazine in Mr. Curtis' library. Not only did they find the articles but they found your picture. I had no difficulty in deciding that you were one and the same. The atmosphere cleared in a jiffy. It became even clearer when it was discovered that you have had a few ancestors and are received in good society—both here and abroad, as the late Fred Townsend Martin would have

said. I hereby officially present the result of subsequent deliberation. Mr. Barnes is invited to dine with us tonight."

Barnes' heart was still pounding rapidly as he made the rueful admission that he "didn't have a thing to wear." He couldn't think of accepting the gracious invitation—

"If they'll take me as I am," began Barnes, doubtfully.

"I say," called out O'Dowd to the sheriff, who was gazing longingly at the horses tethered at the bottom of the slope, "would ye mind leading Mr. Barnes' nag back to the Tavern? He is stopping to dinner. And, while I think of it, are you satisfied, Mr. Sheriff, with the day's work? If not you will be welcome again at any time if ye'll only telephone a half minute in advance." To Barnes he said: "We'll send you down in the automobile tonight, provided it has survived the day. We're expecting the poor thing to die in its tracks at almost any instant."

Ten minutes later Barnes passed through the portals of Green Fancy.

## CHAPTER IX.

The First Wayfarer, the Second Wayfarer and the Spirit of Chivalry Ascendant.

The wide green door, set far back in a recess unlike a kiosk, was opened by a man servant who might easily have been mistaken for a waiter from Delmonico's or Sherry's.

"Say to Mrs. Collier, Nicholas, that Mr. Barnes is here for dinner," said De Soto. "I will make the cocktails this evening."

Much to Barnes' surprise—and disappointment—the interior of the house failed to sustain the bewildering effect produced by the exterior. The entrance hall and the living room into which he was conducted by the two men were singularly like others that he had seen. The latter, for example, was of ordinary dimensions, furnished with a thought for comfort rather than elegance or even good taste. The couches and chairs were low and deep and comfortable, as if intended for men only, and they were covered with rich, gay materials; the hangings at the windows were of deep blue and gold; the walls an unobtrusive cream color, almost literally thatched with etchings.

The stairs were thickly carpeted. At the top his guide turned to the left and led the way down a long corridor. They passed at least four doors before O'Dowd stopped and threw open the fifth on that side of the hall. There were still two more doors beyond.

"Suggests a hotel, doesn't it?" said the Irishman, standing aside for Barnes to enter. "All of the sleeping apartments are on this floor, and the baths and boudoirs and what not. The garret is above, and that's where we deposit our family skeletons, intern our grievances, store our stock of spitefulness and hide all the little devils that must come sneaking up from the city with us whether we will or no. Dabson," addressing the man who had quietly entered the room through the door behind them, "do Mr. Barnes, will ye, and fetch me from Mr. De Soto's room when you're finished. I leave you to Dabson's tender mercies. The saints preserve us! Look at the man's boots! Dabson, get out your brush and dauber first of all. He's been floundering in a bog."

The jovial Irishman retired, leaving Barnes to be "done" by the silent, swift-moving valet. Dabson was young and vigorous and exceedingly well trained. He made short work of "doing" the visitor; barely fifteen minutes elapsed before O'Dowd's return.

Presently they went downstairs together. Lamps had been lighted, many of them, throughout the house. A fire crackled in the cavernous fireplace at the end of the living room and grouped about its cheerful, grateful blaze were the ladies of Green Fancy.

The girl of his thoughts was there, standing slightly aloof from the others, but evidently amused by the tale with which De Soto was regaling them. She was smiling; Barnes saw the sapphire lights sparkling in her eyes and experienced a sensation that was woefully akin to confusion.

But everything went off quite naturally. He favored Miss Cameron with an uncommonly self-possession smile as she gave her hand to him, and she in turn responded with one faintly suggestive of tolerance, although it certainly would have been recorded by a less sensitive person than Barnes as "ripping."

In reply to his perfunctory "delight-

ed, I'm sure, etc.," she said quite clearly: "Oh, now I remember. I was sure I had seen you before, Mr. Barnes. You are the magic gentleman who sprang like a mushroom out of the earth early yesterday afternoon."

"And frightened you," he said; "whereupon you vanished like the mushroom that is gobbled up by the predatory glutton."

He had thrilled at the sound of her voice. It was the low, deliberate voice of the woman of the crossroads, and, as before, he caught the almost imperceptible accent. The red gleam from the blazing logs fell upon her shining hair; it glistened like gold. She wore a simple evening gown of white, softened over the shoulders and neck with a fall of rare valenciennes lace. There was no jewelry—not even a ring on her slender, tapering fingers.

Mrs. Collier, the hostess, was an elderly, heavy-featured woman, decidedly overdressed. Mrs. Van Dyke, her daughter, was a woman of thirty, tall, dark and handsome in a bold, dashing sort of way. The lackadaisical gentleman with the mustache turned out to be her husband.

"My brother is unable to be with us tonight, Mr. Barnes," explained Mrs. Collier. "Mr. O'Dowd may have told you that he is an invalid. Quite rarely is he well enough to leave his room. He has begged me to present his apologies and regrets to you. Another time, perhaps, you will give him the pleasure he is missing tonight."

De Soto's cocktails came in. Miss Cameron did not take one. O'Dowd proposed a toast.

"To the rascals who went gunning for the other rascals. But for them we should be short at least one member of this agreeable company."

It was rather startling. Barnes' glass stopped half way to his lips. An instant later he drained it. He ac-



"Come and Sit Beside Me, Mr. Barnes," She Called Out Gayly.

cepted the toast as a compliment from the willow Irishman, and not as a tribute to the prowess of those mysterious marksmen.

The table in the spacious dining room was one of those long, narrow Italian boards, unmistakably antique and equally rare. Sixteen or eighteen people could have been seated without crowding, and when the seven took their places with intervals separated them. No effort had been made by the hostess to bring her guests close together, as might have been done by using one end or the center of the table. The serving plates were of silver. Especially beautiful were the long-stemmed water goblets and the graceful champagne glasses. They were blue and white and of a design and quality no longer obtainable except at great cost. The esthetic Barnes was not slow to appreciate the rarity of the glassware and the chaste beauty of the serving plates.

The man Nicholas was evidently the butler, despite his Seventh avenue manner. He was assisted in serving by two stalwart and amazingly clumsy footmen, of similar ilk and nationality. On seeing these additional men servants Barnes began figuratively to count on his fingers the retainers he had so far encountered on the place. Already he had seen six, all of them powerful, rugged fellows. It struck him as extraordinary, and in a way

significant, that there should be so many men at Green Fancy.

Much to his disappointment he was not placed near Miss Cameron at table. Indeed she was seated as far away from him as possible. There was a place set between him and De Soto, for symmetry's sake, Barnes concluded. In this he was mistaken; they had barely seated themselves when Mrs. Collier remarked:

"Mr. Curtis' secretary usually joins us here for coffee. He has his dinner with my brother, and then, poor man, comes in for a brief period of relaxation. When my brother is in one of his bad spells poor Mr. Loeb doesn't have much time to himself."

Loeb, the private secretary, came in for coffee. He was a tall, spare man of thirty, pallidly handsome, with dark, studious eyes and features of an unmistakably Hebraic cast, as his name might have foretold. His teeth were marvelously white and his slow smile attractive. More than once during the hour that Loeb spent with them Barnes formed and dismissed a stubborn ever-recurring opinion that the man was not a Jew. Certainly he was not an American Jew. His voice, his manner of speech, his every action stamped him as one born and bred in a land far from Broadway and its counterparts. If a Jew he was of the east as it is measured from Rome—the Jew of the carnal Orient.

And as the evening wore on there came to Barnes the singular fancy that this man was the master and not the servant of the house! He could not put the ridiculous idea out of his mind.

He was to depart at ten. The hour drew near and he had had no opportunity for detached conversation with Miss Cameron. He had listened to her bright retorts to O'Dowd's sallies, and marveled at the ease and composure with which she met the witty Irishman on even terms.

Not until the very close of the evening, and when he had resigned himself to hopelessness, did the opportunity come for him to speak with her alone. She caught his eye, and, to his amazement, made a slight movement of her head, unobserved by the others but curiously imperative to him. There was no mistaking the meaning of the direct, intense look that she gave him.

She was appealing to him as a friend—as one on whom she could depend!

The spirit of chivalry took possession of him. His blood leaped to the call. She needed him and he would not fail her. And it was with difficulty that he contrived to hide the exaltation that might have ruined everything!

While he was trying to invent a pretext for drawing her apart from the others she calmly ordered Van Dyke to relinquish his place on the couch beside her to Barnes.

"Come and sit beside me, Mr. Barnes," she called out gayly. "I will not bite you or scratch you or harm you in any way. Ask Mr. O'Dowd, and he will tell you that I am quite docile. I don't bite, do I, Mr. O'Dowd?"

"You do," said O'Dowd promptly. "You do more than that. You devour. Be damned! I have to look in a mirror to convince myself that you haven't swallowed me whole. That's another way of telling you, Barnes, that she'll absorb you entirely."

For a few minutes she chided him for his unseemly aversion. He was beginning to think that he had been mistaken in her motive, and that after all she was merely satisfying her vanity. Suddenly, and as she smiled into his eyes, she said, lowering her voice slightly:

"Do not appear surprised at anything I may say to you. Smile as if we were uttering the silliest nonsense. So much depends upon it, Mr. Barnes."

Barnes, "bound forever," makes suggestions to the girl that promise excitement.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Staving Off Old Age.

Among many other extraordinary plans for prolonging one's stay on this interesting planet may be mentioned that of a South African farmer who advised people to eat every day four pounds of bananas steeped in sweetened whisky, and that of a professor in the University of Pennsylvania who believed that much could be done in the way of staving off old age by frequently having one's feet tickled!

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